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BEAHM GARDENS

Gertrude W. Beahm

Sherman E. Beahm

2700 Paloma Street
R.F.D. #1 --- Fax 746
Pasadena, California.

ZYGOCACTUS (Christmas Cactus).

The term zygo is from the Greek word meaning yoke. This genus is native of Brazil where they are found growing like orchids in trees. Most varieties branch well from the base some becoming bushy with a woody trunk. Branches on some forms tend to arch outward with a distinct chain effect giving rise to the name of Linkcactus which was used in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Links are obvate to round with a blunt apex or with a horned apex, the latter form giving rise to the term CRABcactus.

The flowers are very beautiful and have a distinctly different shape from most other Epiphytes. Before opening, the bud is pointed forward and seems to be hooked. Before fully opened the uppermost petals are overlapped and tipped forward in a hood or roof effect with the stamens and anthers clinging to the top; the lower petals are spreading and bent back against the tube. In general, the effect is that of an upside-down flower. They may be found in a number of colors including white. They are excellent as corsage material and when so used are worn reversed. Flowers are borne at the apex of the stems and are solitary; rarely two or three. They are zygomorphic, that is, divisible into similar or symmetrical halves by one plane only.

CULTURE:

Culture is not difficult. A very porous soil that drains well and yet remains moist - NOT WET - is best. However, where the plant is a grafted one, it is wise to use soil and other conditions suitable to the growth of the base or root-stock. Epiphytic plants need an airy, moist atmosphere for best results. Their normal food is derived from decayed leaves and bark accumulated in the crotches of the trees in which they have become established. In making an artificial duplication of this condition, we use about one half leaf mold with the balance of the mixture composed of equal parts of soil, coarse gravel and well rotted steer manure with the addition of a small amount of steamed bone meal (possibly a teaspoonful to a three inch pot). Water oftener in the fall while buds are forming, than in the spring. If possible, set the plants aside in a cool, moist place during the hottest months - water sparingly.

The Zygocactus is susceptible to scale and care should be taken to examine the undersides of the leaves regularly, especially right at the union of the joints. At the first sign of any infestation, a mild oil spray should be used. Spray only on cool or cloudy days; the plants may be hosed off after 24 hours; repeat in two weeks if necessary. Your dealer will recommend a suitable one. As a special treat to your plants, soak one pound of cottonseed meal in five gallons of water for 24 to 36 hours or longer. Strain well and use as a foliage spray. It need not be washed off as it is beneficial to both plant and soil. This may be used two or three times a year.

CUTTINGS:

On receiving your rooted cuttings plant them in slightly moist potting soil and wait a day or two before starting regular watering. When potting your plants allow ample room between the soil line and the top of the pot. This will permit the addition of a little fresh potting soil or fertilizer each year without disturbing the roots nor yet getting the pot too full for proper watering. Heavy fertilizing is not to be advised, rather add fresh potting soil. Do not allow the plants to go through a long dry spell without watering, or at least spraying the foliage. Unrooted cuttings should be planted at once to the depth of one-third their length, in SLIGHTLY moist peat and sand using a half and half mixture. They should be kept in a shady place and, if possible, in a moist atmosphere, for rooting. The cuttings may remain for as long as a year in the peat and sand without injury; they are epiphytic, therefore do not require nearly the amount of root feeding that ferns and begonias do.

TRELLISING:

There is no trellising needed with these plants except for those grafted on tall standards. These should be supported as their tops increase in size. A framework simulating an umbrella is often used.

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There are approximately 75 varieties of the Zygocactus (Christmas cactus) mentioned in publications (but not in detail), during the past century. Many are now either lost or found only in private gardens with no data as to their origination and only a meagre description. Apparently only one of these is a species (wild form) found in South America, while the others are hybrids.

We are checking all that we can find. As fast as we secure sufficient propagation of a variety and its identity is established, we will release it to our customers. We have about 30 varieties under observation, at present, but not all will prove sufficiently different in growth or flower to merit the consideration of the general public.

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